



PART A: and PART B:	MATTERS DEALT WITH UNDER DELEGATED POWERS RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL
REPORT TO:	COMMISSIONING BOARD
DATE:	19 SEPTEMBER 2013
REPORT OF THE:	HEAD OF ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE
TITLE OF REPORT:	REVIEW OF VISITOR INFORMATION SERVICES
WARDS AFFECTED:	ALL

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 Following a review of associated costs, performance and customer behaviour, revisions to the District Council's Visitor Information services including Tourist Information Centres (TICs) are being recommended, to be implemented by April 2014 to deliver a saving for the 2014/15 budget.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

PART A - MATTERS DEALT WITH UNDER DELEGATED POWERS

- 2.1 a) It is recommended that:
- (i) The Visitor Information Services review at Annex B be endorsed; and
 - (ii) The Council's primary visitor information services be supported, utilising existing budgets, through the following commissioned tourism services:
 - establishment of Visitor Information Points in Malton and Helmsley;
 - electronic marketing initiatives be undertaken including the development of town apps and enhancements to on-line visitor information and website (utilising funding currently used to support the 'Visit North Yorkshire' paper guide);
 - support marketing and information services for the Wolds and Malton and Norton, and local activities in partnership with Scarborough Borough Council and the North York Moors National Park Authority.

PART B - RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL

- b) That Council is recommended to approve:
- (i) modernisation of the Council's visitor information services to provide face-to-face and telephone information through Pickering TIC only

- (thereby closing Malton and Helmsley TICs) alongside an expanded website and on-line presence; and
- (ii) the savings achieved from the implementation of the above to be considered as part of the Council's 2014/2015 budget strategy process.

3.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The Council has been provided with an indicative Revenue Support Grant (RSG) for 2014/15 and 2015/16. The figures show major cuts in RSG, with particular uncertainty regarding further reductions to the 2015/16 year's figures and future finance. As such the Council is under significant financial pressure regarding delivery of front line services. The Council need to consider revisions and cuts to services and/or charging for services.
- 3.2 A review of visitor information service has been undertaken, a report of which is attached at Annex B (with details of the existing service set out in Annex C).
- 3.3 The resulting key recommendation is to move – from April 2014 - to a modernised service based on face-to-face and telephone provision of Visitor Information being provided through Pickering TIC alongside a strong on-line provision of information. This will provide an affordable Visitor Information service – saving some £54K per annum without redundancies at the Council - that takes account of both current and future visitors' needs and trends in behaviour. A complimentary package of measures includes on-going promotion of the Wolds and Malton and Norton through 'Visit Hull and East Yorkshire' (VHEY) and of other areas and features of Ryedale through commissioned local initiatives, the introduction of visitor information points in Malton and Helmsley and a move to alternative electronic marketing initiatives such as town applications ("apps"), using funding currently used for a printed visitor guide.
- 3.4 In order the ensure implementation for 2014/2015 approval is required from members at this time.

4.0 SIGNIFICANT RISKS

- 4.1 The proposed package includes the closure of two TICs and a gradual withdrawal of funding from the printed visitor and accommodation guide produced for the area. This involves risks in terms of the reputation of the Council and the impact on the local economy, in particular for accommodation providers and other tourism businesses in Ryedale. In particular, there is a need to mitigate the risk that potential visitors to Ryedale may not receive the information that they need to:
- select Ryedale as their tourist destination.
 - maximise their length of stay and their spend in Ryedale.
- 4.2 The measures to mitigate against the potential risks associated with the recommendations in this report are outlined in Annex A. In particular, the retention of Pickering TIC as a central visitor information service and of a strong on-line provision of information are key. Additional steps in terms of introducing visitor information points at Malton and Helmsley and electronic marketing initiatives, such as town apps (optimised for use on mobile phones and tablets) will also assist, alongside ongoing promotion of the Wolds and Malton and Norton.
- 4.3 In order to minimise the risk of withdrawing the £5k annual contribution towards the cost of producing a printed visitor guide to the area, this will continue to be provided until the 2015/16 business year. This will allow Tourism Association North Yorkshire

(TANY) to plan ahead for this withdrawal and seek additional advertising or make other adjustments to their budgets.

5.0 POLICY CONTEXT AND CONSULTATION

- 5.1 Council Aim 2: to create conditions for economic success in Ryedale.
- 5.2 Ryedale Economic Action Plan - Objective B5: *visitor and creative economy* – supporting business led initiatives, product development and community owned facilities.
- 5.3 Consultation with tourism businesses undertaken as part of the tourism commissioning review in 2010 indicated a range and variety of views around the level of charging (commission), the number and location of TICs and the range of services offered. However, consensus was reached on the need to improve communication, rationalise activity and to work more closely with the private sector.
- 5.4 The feedback received through budget consultation undertaken in 2012 with focus groups included the following:
'Tourism and Tourist Information Centres was an area that could be cut. People felt that this was an industry that provided low paid jobs and should be self financed by the Tourism Industry.'

REPORT

6.0 REPORT DETAILS

Background

- 6.1 The Commissioning Board reviewed the tourism activity of this Council in January 2011. This resulted in several commissions being undertaken to market areas of Ryedale both domestically and overseas and product development. The principles of tourism service delivery that were agreed were:
- It is desirable to maintain a meaningful tourism delivery service.
 - The service can be delivered in a variety of ways; working in partnership, commissioning some targeted services and stopping delivery of other tourism functions, which are not a high priority.
 - The tourism service should be seen as an economic development function – to meet the Council's aims in terms of economic prosperity and to deliver jobs, skills and creating the right conditions for economic prosperity. Tourism businesses should be encouraged to participate in current business liaison activity such as the Work and Skills Partnership and Local Enterprise Partnership development.
 - The tourism service should address areas of market failure – where the private sector is not able to drive its own service delivery.
 - All activity should take place in partnership with the private sector.
 - In these times of challenge for public sector budgets, service delivery should be targeted at areas in most need of economic development support. In terms of the Ryedale Needs Assessment, this identifies the Wolds area of Ryedale as a priority.
 - The tourism service should be flexible to adapt to changing nature of public and private expenditure.
- 6.2 The table below identifies the budgets associated with the provision of Tourism services by the Council:

Budget Item	2013/14 £
TIC Provision	91,270
Helmsley TIC – 20,000	20,000
Malton TIC – 34,350	34,350
Pickering TIC – 36,920	36,920
Tourism	101,110
Salaries	39,460
Hired services	61,650
Total	192,380

6.3 It can be seen that the TIC provision has an associated cost of £91K. Through a separate Tourism budget of £101K the Council funds a Visitor Economy Officer and commissions a range of tourism-related services (via a hired services budget of £61K). This expenditure is detailed in Annex B, together with further information about the tourism review undertaken by the Commissioning Board in 2010/11, which led to the Council commissioning a range of providers e.g. Visit Hull and East Yorkshire, TANY and Welcome To Yorkshire (WTY) to undertake specified marketing and promotion activities.

Visitor Information Services review

6.4 The methods by which visitors choose to receive information, and by which visitor economy businesses choose to provide this information, has continued to change rapidly due to the pace of new technology. Hand-held devices (such as mobile phones and tablets) and the increased use of the internet mean that many visitors gain information prior to visiting an area and once arrived at the destination. There has been a trend away from use of printed material, with on-line information being seen by many as more accessible and more likely to be up to date.

6.5 In recognition of this and to ensure that the Council's budget is effectively directed, Commissioning Board on 22 November 2012 considered a report on 'Visitor Information Services in Ryedale'. The resolution was 'That a review of the Authority's visitor information services, to include Helmsley TIC, be undertaken as outlined in the report'. This would include a detailed review of the provision of visitor information that is provided directly by the Council, or in which it has a stake, including the TICs at Malton, Helmsley and Pickering, the 'Visit North Yorkshire' printed holiday guide and 'VisitRyedale' website. The review would also investigate new social media activities and identify new ways of working more closely with local business for the provision of detailed local information, such as phone 'apps', with a view to converting the visitor numbers to a growth of the visitor economy. The officer review would be undertaken and then be presented to Members for consideration, with a view to implementation of conclusions for the 2014/15 financial year.

6.6 The accompanying reports "Annex B Visitor Information Review July 2013" and Annex C "What we have now" set out the review that has been undertaken by Officers of Visitor Information services provided or supported by Ryedale District Council. This review considers existing services, current performance and trends and potential revisions to the service, and takes account of the need for the Council's overall financial position and the need to identify savings.

6.7 The review considered options for the provision of Visitor Information, including the case for retention of the three existing TICs in Ryedale and the possibilities of utilising new technologies and alternative provision options. The key conclusions in relation to the Council's visitor information services are:

Key conclusions

Tourist Information Services

- Retention of all TICs – at zero saving - is discounted given budget pressures, changes in visitor behaviour and the disparity in performance between the three TICs.
- Closure or only one TIC – either Helmsley or Malton – would achieve only limited savings (either £20K or £34K per annum, respectively) and is not recommended. This view reflects the need to reduce Council budgets, the increasing changes in the way that visitors seek information and the significant difference in the performance of the TICs in Ryedale (Pickering has by far the highest footfall, bookings, enquiries and income. It has around three times as many visitors as Malton. Notably, in terms of the values achieved through bookings into the area, Pickering achieves 14 times the value achieved through Malton TIC and over 30 times the value achieved through Helmsley TIC).
- Closure of all TICs is not recommended at this stage, despite projected savings of £83K in year one and £98K in year two and other nearby local authorities having followed this approach. The first-year costs associated with this option include the requirement for redundancy of 2.6 FTE staff in the Business Hub.
- The primary reasons for not recommending closure of all TICs at this stage are:
 - *Significant numbers of our visitors still seek face-to-face or telephone information and use paper based guides and leaflets, both prior to coming to Ryedale and once here. Older population may not yet be using hand held devices such as tablets and smart phones, which are predominantly used by younger age groups, and there are some local challenges with access to 3G and wi-fi.*
 - *This would leave a very sizable part of north east Yorkshire without a TIC, as can be seen from the map at the back of Annex B.*
 - *Pickering would also provide advice via telephone and email for all customers seeking VI by these means, as a compliment to the Council's web-based VI.*
 - *This option would have a staff requirement that is closely matched to current levels of permanent staffing for the TICs.*
 - *There are likely to be symbiotic benefits to both the face-to-face and on-line provision of VI if the Council retains an element of TIC service (e.g. Pickering only) and the web service. Experience and feedback from both aspects of the service can be expected to assist with the improvement of face-to-face / telephone-based and on-line visitor information provision.*
- Closure of Malton and Helmsley TICs is recommended, with an attendant saving of £54K per annum. This saving can be achieved without the requirement for redundancies at Ryedale District Council.
- The performance of Pickering TIC should continue to be monitored, together with visitor behaviour and trends and the rate at which broadband and wi-fi distribution is improved within Ryedale.

Visit North Yorkshire Holiday Guide – Paper based

- Whist still popular, paper guides are becoming less necessary and budgetary constraints are increasing. Local authority financial support should be gradually reducing to a point of withdrawal, although officer support can be maintained based on current officer resources.

Visitor Information Points

- At Malton and Helmsley, work with a local shop / post office / public facility to provide a Visitor Information Point with shelf space for publications, wi-fi for downloading info and some training of their staff. Annual retainer plus support

from RDC staff. NB such support is unlikely to be possible should Members decide to shut all the Ryedale TICs, with the associated redundancy of 2.6FTE Business Hub staff.

Commissioned Visitor Information Services

- Retain the commissioned activity from VHEY to promote tourism in the Wolds and Malton and Norton, plus WTY local branch to produce joint literature and campaigns with a Ryedale focus.

Web and digital visitor information

- Expand provision of electronic communication, both for Ryedale and in partnership with other providers, utilising the Council's Visitor Economy Officer. This relates to the Visit Ryedale website, app development if appropriate and market town websites. All our paper based products are now replicated on website provision / available to download etc.

7.0 IMPLICATIONS

7.1 The following implications have been identified:

a) Financial

No change to existing TIC arrangements incurs no additional cost to the Council, but delivers no budgetary saving.

Closure of Malton and Helmsley TICs (the preferred option) achieves £54,350 savings in 2014/15 and subsequent years.

Closure of all three TICs achieves £83,270 savings in 2014/15 and £98,270 subsequently.

b) Legal

The current agreements for Helmsley TIC terminates 31st March 2014. The current lease agreement with Malton Library requires 6 months notice for termination and so could not be fully implemented until six months after a decision on this matter by Council.

c) Other (Equalities, Staffing, Planning, Health & Safety, Environmental, Crime & Disorder)

An equalities impact assessment has been drafted in relation to the various options.

The option to close all of the Council's TICs would result in compulsory redundancy of 2.6 fte members of staff from the Business Support Hub.

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Background Papers:

Financial Strategy - Budget Consultation

Background Papers available for inspection at:

<http://democracy.ryedale.gov.uk/documents/q968/Public%20reports%20pack%2007th-Feb-2013%2018.30%20Policy%20and%20Resources%20Committee.pdf?T=10> Pages 47-50